THE DAILY SHORT STORY

Her Rowdy.

By WILL T. AMES.

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THE strike was called by the motormen and conductors themselves, at the end of a turbulent meeting, during which the men, yielding to the magnetic influence of Kolb, the oratorical agitator, had booed their own officials and jeered at a letter from the head of their national union declaring the proposed walkout to be ill-advised, if not wholly unjustifiable. "You are being sold out!" Kolb had shouted. And somehow he made the men believe him. Setting tradition and discretion alike at defiance, the trolleymen streamed out of their hall alight with the excitement of a fight in which they felt, under the spell of Kolb that they were championing the cause of all oppressed workers as well as their own. An hour after midnight the last car had been returned to the barn, and next morning not a wheel turned on any of the city lines.

At 5:30 that afternoon a girl with gold-brown eyes and red hair plodded wearily along on the last half mile of a two-mile walk between office and home. All the town was walking, save a handful of adventurous souls who took chances on the rarely occasional car the traction people had been operating since noon, defying the jeers of the mob and the risk of pebbles flung by hoodlums.

But company in misery very slightly palliated the discomfort of the unaccustomed tramp that Glory Blair had been compelled to take with scarcely an idle minute in it. She could do very well without any pedestrian exercise immediately before or after it, she thought. "It's an outrage, that's what it is!" she protested.

The worst of it was, Glory was worried about the job, too. She had begun to suspect that McKnight, the promoter by whom she was employed, might be a bit of a wildcatter. Glory was merely his stenographer and had nothing to do with his accounts; but little things recently had given her the impression that it would not be surprising if McKnight were to close that office of his suddenly, some of these days, and fade away. So, altogether, Miss Blair was in a rather depressed state at the moment when a group of uniformed trolleymen, standing on the corner and scoffing loudly at the efforts of a couple of traction company office men to run a car, caught her eye.

It wasn't exactly the group that caught her eye. It was Ford Burgoyne. Ford was one of the strikers. He hadn't been a trolleyman very long. He had been a "tech." school man, and then he had gone across and got gassed and come back with a bronchitis that forbade his staying indoors, the doctors said, for at least two years; and meantime his father had died broke, and Ford had found himself obliged to quit college and earn a living, and do it at "outside work."

All of a sudden Ford, who was laughing as loudly as any of the crowd at the unfortunate amateurs on the car, realized that Glory Blair was standing stock still, six feet away, looking at him with an expression he had never seen on her face before. He left the group instantly.

Glory didn't give him so much as time to say, "How do you do?"

"I'm rather glad that I chanced to see you, Mr. Burgoyne," she said, and the chill of disillusionment was in her voice. "If some one else had told me they heard you hooting and blackguarding decent people on the public streets, I should have refused to believe it."

"But Glory," protested Ford, "those fellows are just plain strikers, now. Surely——"

"Surely," blazed Glory, interrupting him, "to be a strike breaker in this kind of a strike is infinitely more creditable, Ford Burgoyne, than to set a city full of tired, wornout people afoot in torrid weather like this. But I see now that I have given my friendship to a mere rowdy, who could never, by any possibility, look at things as I do. I just wanted to say that you needn't come to see me this evening—nor ever. Good-by." And Glory Blair, stepping around Burgoyne, who would have detained her if he could, marched off with the air of a duchess—and a lump in her throat and an ache in her heart—for she had come to be more than fond of this tall young fellow, who had faced his altered future with so sunny a laugh and so willingly followed the admonition, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do."

The strike had been on a week. The company was operating. The public was riding when it could. The strikers, feeling themselves losing ground and failing to secure the indorsement of their own national organization or of other labor unions, had fallen into an ugly mood. They stood moodily about in groups. There was no more of the amused railing at incompetent strike breakers. Some of them, completely dominated by the ubiquitous Kolb, were working themselves up to the point of violence. Sheer stubborn pride kept most of the men in line. One of these was Ford Burgoyne, who had been harder hit by the disaffection of Glory Blair than by the loss of his job, and who was in a somber, pessimistic frame of mind. He felt like smashing things.

Ford was standing, one of a group of twenty trolley men, at the very corner where had occurred his disastrous encounter with Glory. Half an hour before a west side car had been held up, stoned and the motorman and conductor taken off and beaten. Now every passing trolley was target for verbal abuse for passengers and crew alike. Several of Kolb's best adherents were in the crowd of riff-raff that fringed the group of strikers. One of these, a red-faced rough, suddenly called out:

"Get onto what's on the tail end of this car—a skirt! Whatcha know about that! Hey, you people, you gotta stop that when it's startin' or they'll have 'em in all your jobs. Come on an' get her!" The red-faced man started toward the car as it stopped for the crossing. Three or four gangster type youths yelled "Get the skirt!" As with one impulse, half a hundred men and boys surged about the platform. The red-faced man, leaping up the steps, seized the small figure of the conductor and dragged it to the street. Some one struck at the strike breaker over the red-faced man's shoulder—and then Ford Burgoyne came smashing and boring into the crowd with all the grim relentlessness of those football days before ever the gas had got to him.

"You dirty yellow dogs!" he panted, ripping the collar clear off one gangster's coat as he hauled him out of his path and landing a rangy right under the red-faced man's ear at the same instant. "Turn around here and fight a man—you woman beaters!" and another rioter went down for the count.

The little conductor, freed from her assailant's grip, was reeling, her hands to her head, when Ford seized her arms, lifted her to the platform and kicking a last ambitious rough off the step, rang the starting bell. As the car pulled away from the corner and out of the incipient mob, he looked down at the little conductor. "Good God! Glory Blair!" he breathed.

"You see, Ford," said Glory, as they sat on the tiny side porch of Glory's little home, "if it had been just for me it might not have made quite so much difference. Any man will fight for the woman he wants. But I knew you didn't get a good look at me—and how could you ever guess I'd lose my place and just had to have work, with that interest coming due on the houses? And a man who'll do that sort of thing just for woman—any woman—well, he isn't a rowdy, anyhow, Ford. Seeing that you're not—and now that crazy strike is all over—maybe, as you say, I'd better give up conductoring and take the job you offered me."

The Story Lady

"Papa," tell me a story." Peter snuggled on the grass at his father's feet.

A nice, true, ordinary story, that really happened to you a long time ago."

"Well, when I was just five years old, my grandfather who lived in the country twenty miles from where we did came to see us and took me home with him on the train. I didn't get a bit homesick even if I was just a baby. I stayed two weeks and then we got a letter saying that my mother was sick and for me to stay a while longer. At last the time came for me to go home and we wrote for my father to meet us. But at the last my grandfather decided to drive his little team of mules to the high wagon and take some lambs to the town where my father lived as the price was better.

"We went to bed early. I remember my grandfather gave me my bath that night and put on the little suit I was to wear the next day. The next thing I knew I was lying on a quilt in the front end of the wagon. The mules were trotting right along, and I could hear the heavy breathing of the sheep in the back of the wagon. It was still dark and the stars were shining.

"I got up and sat between grandpa and grandma and ate cinnamon rolls out of a sack. After a long while the sky began to get dark and we could see that a hard rain storm was coming from from north.

"I was very much scared and hid my head in the quilt but before it rained hard we came to a little country schoolhouse and went in.

"I found a piece of chalk the first I had ever had. When it stopped we went on and just as the sun came up we drove into the yard at home. My mother was out doors feeding the chickens and when we drove up she dropped the corn and ran to the wagon.

"Give me my boy,' she said and hugged me over and over.

"I wondered then how I had stayed away so long.

"That's a good story," said Peter "It sounded jes' like it was true."